

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 83 – REVELATION 20 - RESURRECTION TO JUDGMENT]

Last time we finished with the resurrection of the saints, those who had died in the faith or were resurrected at Christ's return.

- ◆ But what about the rest of humanity? The great mass of struggling sinful humanity who up till this point may never have even heard of Jesus Christ, or if they have, refused to engage with the gospel message of salvation? What does God have in store for them?
- ◆ This is where the second resurrection comes in.
- ◆ ***Revelation 20: 11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.***
- ◆ This is judgment day when all have to give an account for their thoughts and actions.

But before we look at this section of scripture a little more closely, I made the non-traditional statement last time that Christ's mission to the church of making disciples of all men does not cease at Christ's return.

- ◆ A more traditional interpretation of this event is for the "good" to go up to heaven and the "evil" to go down to hell based on their deeds.
- ◆ However in this scenario I am proposing, this mission to make disciples comes to its ultimate exciting conclusion after Christ's return.
- ◆ Christ has gathered together a special group of people who have been prepared to play an important role in the great white throne judgment when the billions who have ever lived are resurrected back to life.
- ◆ This special group is made up of the resurrected saints of the church age who join with the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament.
- ◆ Imagine this group for one moment. Here we have the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 11; Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the prostitute Rahab, David, Samuel and the prophets, together with Jesus' disciples, Paul, the early church fathers, the reformers and saints from every age being brought together in preparation for this great day.
- ◆ ***Revelation 20:4-6 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.***
- ◆ All of these faithful servants would have arrived in heaven with their own personal worldview depending on the age in which they lived, with their own limited or distorted view of God's purpose or doctrines, with the opportunity to meet with the risen Christ in preparation for this great event.
- ◆ And like the apostle Paul, who had a special encounter with the risen Christ and was the greatest proponent of the gospel message after meeting with Jesus, these saints have had the opportunity to be taught personally by Jesus Christ in preparation for this momentous day (1 Corinthians 15:3-7; Galatians 1:11).
- ◆ Notice they were given positions of leadership, (thrones), authority to judge so that when this great mass of humanity rise from their graves, there are saints there from their own era to relate to them and I would suggest, guide them into God's gospel truth.
- ◆ ***1 Corinthians 6:3 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?***
- ◆ What would be the purpose of having saints there to judge if it were already decided who was "in" and who was "out"?
- ◆ I would suggest the trained, resurrected saints have been enlisted by Jesus Christ to further His mission of making disciples of all nations at this crucial time of judgment.
- ◆ And perhaps this is when the foolish and powerless bride of Christ will shame the wise and powerful of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26-27; James 2:5).

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Back to Revelation 20, where we see the bewildered and confused dead, both small and great mulling around wondering what is going on.

- ◆ This great mass of humanity standing before the judge Jesus Christ is made up of various groups.
- ◆ There are billions who haven't even heard the name Jesus Christ or what He has done for them.
- ◆ Another group who have different levels of comprehension of who Jesus is and what He has done for them but have not acted on that information.
- ◆ Then there are the countless babies and children who have died prematurely and the mentally incapacitated that have not had the capacity to make a decision one way or the other.
- ◆ Also included in this group will be those whose lives were brought to a premature end because of their extreme wickedness such as those in Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the inhabitants of the Promised Land.
- ◆ This is also the time when those who have suffered collateral damage as part of the great drama being played out on this earth are resurrected such as Job's children, and the child of King David and Bathsheba.
- ◆ ***Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.***
- ◆ Two sets of books are identified, a book of deeds, and the book of life.
- ◆ Our actions matter to God. He is a holy God of justice and righteousness and injustice needs to be punished (Romans 6:23).
- ◆ And when this book of deeds reveals our deeds, there is only one conclusion for all men, we are all pronounced guilty of sin and injustice.
- ◆ ***Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***
- ◆ We are all exposed for the wicked sinners we are.
- ◆ And if this is the basis by which we are judged, then there is no hope for any of us. We would all be shipped off to the hell that rebellious sinners deserve.
- ◆ But God has provided a way for sinners to make the transition from having our names moved from the book of deeds to the book of life.
- ◆ This is because; in reality this is not the final judgment. The final judgment happened when Jesus went to the cross on behalf of not only the resurrected saints of the first resurrection, but also for the rest of humanity now standing before Him.
- ◆ Once Jesus has uttered that awful cry of God-forsakenness on the cross (Matthew 27:46) are we supposed to believe there will be those who have to take this cry up on their own lips as though Christ has not uttered it for them?
- ◆ The great decisive turning point of salvation history happened when Jesus defeated Satan, sin and evil at the cross.
- ◆ So even though Jesus stands before them as their Judge, He also stands there as their Savior with a robe dipped in blood that wants to give them the gift of eternal life (Revelation 19:13).
- ◆ ***Romans 11:32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.***
- ◆ We read about this Savior who wants to extend mercy to all back in Revelation 5:9.
- ◆ ***Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.***
- ◆ I have mentioned this before, but whether or not we want to admit it or not, as this verse stresses, we have all been implicated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ With His blood He has ***"purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."***
- ◆ Jesus Christ has invested His blood in every individual as He substituted Himself and died for all humanity (2 Corinthians 5:19).
- ◆ He came and did for us what we could not do for ourselves.
- ◆ And if the death penalty has already been paid, God is not going to ask for it a second time, unless of course someone is foolish enough to reject what Christ has already paid for on their behalf.

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In an earlier session, I mentioned we should take note of this phrase, “every tribe and language and people and nation.”

- ◆ In the five times this phrase is mentioned in the book, it is applied in reference to both the wicked and the redeemed.
- ◆ For instance, in Revelation 13 it is applied in reference to worshipers of the beast out of the sea.
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:7-8 It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸ All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.***
- ◆ By contrast, in Revelation 7 it shows them joining with the 144,000 faithful saints of the church age.
- ◆ ***Revelation 7:9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.***
- ◆ Somehow this immense group of sinful humanity has made the vast leap from beast worshipers to wearing white robes and waving palm branches.
- ◆ How is this possible? There is only one way sinners can cross this vast gulf and that is via the same way the saints have crossed, through the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ.

To understand how this judgment of people from “every nation, tribe, people and language” is going to proceed, we need to remember some important principles we have learned throughout this series of sermons.

1. All have experienced the hell of what life is like without God.

- ◆ All, both good and bad, have eaten from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil and seen and experienced the consequences of that diet.
- ◆ Unlike Adam and Eve who had no experience of sin or evil prior to their fateful decision to disobey God, all of mankind now knows the consequences of what life is like separated from God.
- ◆ One truth the serpent was right about was, they would “be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5).
- ◆ Given the opportunity to now experience heaven, life with God, the possibility of their accepting the gift of grace increases dramatically.

2. The devil and his demons are no longer around to exert their evil influence on mankind.

- ◆ They were cast into the lake of fire prior to this event happening and now cannot meddle in the decision, as has been the case since the Garden of Eden.

3. Jesus Christ has redeemed man’s fallen human nature.

- ◆ When Jesus became man, He assumed our humanity including man’s fallen nature in order to restore it to its original state.
- ◆ “That which He has not assumed He has not healed.” – Gregory of Nazianzus.
- ◆ It is with this redeemed nature humanity will be resurrected.

4. This great multitude, because of God’s grace, in an objective or corporate sense, stand before Jesus Christ as forgiven sinners (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19).

- ◆ For the preceding 2000 years, the message of the gospel has been about God’s grace. This doesn’t suddenly change at this crucial point in the story.
- ◆ It is best to anticipate what God will do on past behaviour rather than on how we may interpret Daniel and Revelation.
- ◆ However, what is clear is each individual has to accept God’s gift of grace personally in order for his or her position to move from the objective to the subjective.
- ◆ This means repenting of their sins and accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
- ◆ This is not universalism, a decision for Christ is non-negotiable, and the gift offered has to be accepted.

5. The Holy Spirit along with the resurrected saints teach them spiritual truths and are willing each of them to accept Christ as their Savior.

- ◆ As we have all experienced, the Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to understand spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

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- ◆ He opens closed eyes and softens hard hearts to be receptive to the freely given grace of God.
 - ◆ We have to assume an adequate period of time is allowed for this spiritual instruction to take place.
 - ◆ This allows for those who have never had the opportunity to choose for or against the kingdom “before” death are now given the opportunity to do so “after” death.
 - ◆ This view is referred to as “future probation” or “probation after death” although this option is rarely given serious consideration among many theologians.
 - ◆ I’m sure God will have a special program prepared for infants, children and the now healed mentally impaired to be instructed in the ways of the Lord, most likely involving their parents.
 - ◆ However, back to the vast multitude. As in the case of the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43), or the repentant crowd on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-38), this process of instruction does not necessarily take an inordinate amount of time.
 - ◆ The 3000 that were added to the church on the day of Pentecost will be peanuts compared to what will happen on the Day of Judgment when both Jesus and the Holy Spirit show up.
 - ◆ And on the subject of the Jews, this is also the time when Paul’s prophecy of the Jews being grafted back onto the olive tree in Romans 11 comes to fruition (Romans 11:1-32).
- 6. *Standing before them is the merciful judge, Jesus Christ wearing a robe dipped in blood, who has died for every last one of them and no longer holds their sin against them.***
- ◆ This is the Judge who has pronounced them guilty, but then gets up, walks around from behind the bench and accepts the death penalty on their behalf.
 - ◆ Even the worst sinner in the lowest depths of despair will find the God who judges them will accompany them to the seat of judgment and stand in their stead to receive that judgment, such is God’s love.
 - ◆ Salvation is possible for all men, but God’s gift of salvation has to be accepted.
 - ◆ Hopefully all will realize resistance to God’s love is futile and willingly respond to His gift of grace.
 - ◆ ***John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.***
- 7. *Finally, as we have seen throughout the series, God is about life and hope, not death and destruction.***
- ◆ Death and destruction are not going to have the final word.
 - ◆ The God humanity has to deal with at the judgment has already revealed His wrath and judgment to punish sin through the death of His Son.
 - ◆ Is it not God’s nature to bring children into existence just to consign the vast majority to hell any more than a loving parent would?
 - ◆ God’s purpose throughout this whole process is to create man “in His image,” not to destroy him.
 - ◆ From the beginning God chose Abraham, the father of God’s people, that through his descendant, Jesus, “all nations of the earth would be blessed” (Genesis 22:15-18).
 - ◆ He wants to share the life and love of the Trinity with humanity and has gone to extraordinary lengths to achieve this purpose.
 - ◆ Instead of ending in tragedy, this event is a victory celebration as it is the culmination of all God has planned for humanity.
 - ◆ Evil will finally be rooted out of existence and that is good news for everybody.
- Because of these factors, the deck is massively loaded in favour of the defendants.***
- ◆ In these circumstances, what do you think is going to happen?
 - ◆ It is hard to believe any could resist this divine invitation of grace.
 - ◆ One’s destiny is no longer linked to death through their sin, but rather through relation to Jesus Christ through faith.
 - ◆ Through His atonement on their behalf, Christ has broken the link between sin and death and is instead offering them eternal life.
 - ◆ However, these billions now face a decision, is it going to be heaven or hell. Do they wish to proceed based on their deeds, or on Christ’s deeds?

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- ◆ If you like, it's very much like the circumstance of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal, does he swallow his pride and join the party after his father's loving plea, or does he stand outside and wallow in self pity? (Luke 15:25-32).
- ◆ Jesus is patiently waiting, pen raised to cross out their name in the book of deeds and add it to the book of life.
- ◆ A simple nod is all that is needed but most fall down in worship of their Savior.
- ◆ Jesus takes their hands, lifts them into a loving embrace and leads them over to partake of the tree of life and to drink from the healing waters that flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1-2,14).
- ◆ All the bitterness and pain of their past life that has been gnawing at their hearts falls away and they are filled with an extraordinary feeling of ecstasy as their fleshly earthly body is transformed into a glorious spiritual body equipped for life in heaven.
- ◆ The accompanying host of saints and angels break into joyful celebration as another child of God joins the family of God.